Pavithrotsavam: Kshama Yachana

Pavithrotsavam means holy festival. The Agni Puran states that we should perform the Pavithrotsavam either at the beginning of the month of Aashada (June- July) or the end of the month of Krithika (mid-October). The Garud Purana states that we should perform this festival on the 12th day of the waxing or waning phase of the lunar month.

We perform the Pavithrotsavam in the Ranganatha temple in Tiruneermalai, Chennai, the Ananta Padmanabhaswamy temple in Vishakhapatnam, the Ayyappa temple in Ongole, in Andhra Pradesh and in various other temples associated with Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams. And we follow the norms prescribed by our predecessors everywhere. Yes, we too can participate in the Pavithrotsavam if we pay the stipulated fee to the temple authorities. So we call the Pavithrotsavam as an Arjita Seva.

In the Tirumala Tirupati temple in Andhra Pradesh, we celebrate this festival for three specific days in the month of Shravan (July – August). We worship Venkateshwara Balaji, a form of Vishnu during the Pavithrotsavam every year.

The Agama form of worship in Tirupati

In the Tirupati temple, we follow the 'Vaikanasa Agamam' traditions of worship which emphasise on ritualistic worship. But in the 'Nigama' form of worship we emphasize on garnering deep knowledge about the gods.

Sage Vikhanasa first prescribed these Agama traditions. Rishi Atri, Brighu, Marichi and Kashyapa then passed it on to the

successive generations. We, the followers of Vaikanasa Agama traditions believe that Lord Vishnu alone is the supreme deity.

So we perform the pooja according to the Agama traditions 6 times in a day, every day. We offer the sevas in a particular sequence every day. We observe other rituals too strictly on a weekly, monthly and periodic basis. And we perform the Pavithrotsavam too which happens to be a periodic ritual.

The significance of Pavithrotsavam

But this festival is unique and of deep significance, because we celebrate it for three specific days. Our sole purpose is to ask the presiding deity, a form of Lord Vishnu for forgiveness.

We know the temple priests take utmost care to perform the rituals correctly all through the year. But we also know that they may have knowingly or unknowingly committed mistakes while performing the rituals, poojas and sevas. And we realize that our sins of omission and commission may accumulate over time. So we do our best to correct our mistakes by asking our lord to forgive us.

That is why we call this festival as ‘Dosha Nivaarana’ which means error correction. Pavithrotsavam is also known as ‘Sarva Yagna Phalapradha’. This means the priests get the benefits of performing all poojas, sevas and rituals of one whole year by performing the Pavithrotsavam.

The Pavitralu garlands

We make the Pavitralu garlands out of five colours: black, blue, red, yellow and green. And we craft them using high-quality

cotton material. We grow these cotton plants amidst shrubs of Tulsi in a special piece of land reserved for it. The priests too wear the Pavitralu while performing all the rituals.

According to the Jayakhya Samhita, the Pavitralu garlands protect us from evil forces. The Puranas state that ‘Pavitra Aaropana’ – the tradition of adorning the deity with these sanctified Pavitralu garlands- is the most important ritual of the Pavithrotsavam.

Pavitrotsavam in Tirupati

We worship the Utsav murti of Lord Malayappa swami and his two consorts Shridevi and Bhudevi during this festival.

Dashami: the first day of the Pavithrotsavam

We begin the festival with ‘Ankurarpanam.’We sow nine kinds of holy seeds in earthen containers within the temple premises. The priests recite the Vedas constantly in the background on all three days. We call this procedure ‘Mritsangrahana’.

We then invoke the presiding deity, a form of Vishnu (Avahana) in the Pradhana Kumbha, a pot containing water. Then we place sixteen other kumbhas around the Pradhana Kumbha. When the priests chant the Vedas continuously, they infuse these Kumbhas with divine vibrations. We then follow this with the Homam ceremony. We offer our prayers to the sacrificial fire in the Yagnashala which lies inside the temple.

After this we perform the ritual of Thirumanjanam. We adorn the deities first with garlands made out of Tulsi. This purifies and cleanses the surroundings. Now we perform the

‘Kesarasnanam.’ We then bathe the deities with saffron imbued water.

We now perform the ‘Abhishekam.’This means we bathe the deities with a mixture of turmeric, sandal paste, honey, milk, curd and consecrated water. And we believe that Lord Vishnu will emerge with a protective armour called ‘Abhidyeyakam’ to ward off the evil forces in Kaliyuga. That is why we worship this armour of God too during the Abhishekam. This procedure takes a couple of hours.

The priests seek forgiveness from their lord for all their acts of omission and commission that they knowingly or unknowingly committed while performing the poojas all through the year.

We worship the main deity and all the Utsav murtis too with Homam and Thirumanjanam during the Pavithrotsavam.

Ekadashi: the second day of Pavitrotsavam

After the Snapana Thirumanjanam, we drape the deities in rich silk garments. We then adorn them with gold and diamond jewellery. We then place the Pavitralu garlands around their head, neck and waist. Then we take them out on a procession through the four main streets. We adorn all the Utsav murtis and deities in the temple and the neighbouring temples too with Pavitralu on this day.

Dwadashi: Purnahuti: the third day of the festival

On Dwadashi we take the Pradhana Kumbha(which we had worshipped on Dashami and Ekadashi) to the main idol of Tirupati Balaji. It is believed that this enhances the spiritual

power of the idol. We make special offerings to lord Malayappa and his consorts on this day and then take them out on a procession.

We now perform the Purnahuthi within the premises of the temple. Pavithrotsavam is a very sacred festival. So thousands of devotees throng on the streets during the procession. For no one wants to miss out on imbibing the pure vibrations the deities radiate during this festival.

The essence of Pavithrotsavam

The Pavithrotsavam helps us accept our limitations and purges the guilt that hangs heavy on our hearts. We have to pay for and atone for all the sins that we have committed if not in this lifetime, in the next one or the one after that. That thought often burdens our heart. But after witnessing the rituals of the Pavithrotsavam, we realize that there is space for forgiveness too in God’s realm. Such beautiful rituals nurture good thoughts in our minds and such thoughts give us a lot of comfort when we need them the most. And that is the essence of the Pavithrotsavam.